

# STUDENTS HELP A TEACHER CALLED TO ACTIVE DUTY

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My technology education students at Tecumseh Middle School were completing a design activity when I was notified that one of my former students from a Purdue class, Ryan Smith, was called to active military duty. Ryan was teaching technology education at Lafayette Jefferson High School when he was called by the military in the fall of 2004 to report to active duty. Before Christmas 2004, Ryan was sent to Iraq where he is now stationed at Camp Cedar.

A fellow Tecumseh Middle School technology educator's wife stated that military service personnel need items to occupy their time. Steven Schellenberger, my student teacher from Purdue, and I asked our first two classes what their thoughts were about helping a Jeff High School teacher who was called to Iraq. The first two classes were 100% in favor of helping. After some discussions, two types of games were to be produced. The next two classes were not asked if they wanted to make something for Mr. Smith, and some students asked why they couldn't help. What a great feeling to have a group of students who are excited and want to help a teacher in need so many miles from home.

With a few phone calls, local companies also wanted to help, and they donated materials to produce the games. They thought it was a fantastic idea that the younger generation wanted to help!

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Figure 1. Steve Schellenberger, student teacher, Kendall Haywood, and Pedro Hernandez are placing the location for the holes to be drilled.



Figure 2. Steve Schellenberger and Michael Antibus are drilling holes for the marble storage.



Figure 3. Shane Becker is assembling the game.

When the students completed the games (tee-hop and tic-tac-toe), I sent them to Mr. Smith. Ryan gave the games to other people in the service and to the children in Iraq. The students did not care who received the games, as both soldiers and civilians were in need.

Ryan's wife, Jennifer Smith, has been sending updates on what is happening with him to many people in the community. The information about the games, student excitement, and contact appeared on the IdeaGarden. From this sharing of information, Mr. Smith received many messages from ITEA members. It is our hope that this accomplishment will help Jennifer and Ryan get through his tour in Iraq, and encourage Ryan to return to Lafayette to teach our future leaders!



Figure 4. Blake Phebus and Channie Williams are drilling holes for the marble retainer.



A letter from Ryan Smith, teacher and ITEA member:

Dear Mr. Yuill and students,

I would like to thank you all so much for putting your skills and effort to use in a noble way. I received the package of games about a week ago. I began by passing them out to the troops at the camp we are staying at. They were all very excited to have something new to take up the time. I started telling them about where the games came from and they would smile and tell me stories of their personal experiences in similar classes as kids. Some of them even smelled the wood and said it took them back to happier places. We are all far away from our families and loved ones. It means so much to us when people from home send things like this to raise our spirits and help us remember why we are here. You have all brought a little bit of home to us over here in the desert.

The rest of the games were passed out on a humanitarian mission where we go out and give food, water, and supplies to the Iraqi citizens surrounding our camp. These people are nomadic, they move around from place to place all the time, and most are sheep herders. They do not have electricity or running water. Many of the children can be seen daily by the roads asking for food or water from passing convoys of coalition forces. There is a huge language barrier, but most of the Iraqis know minimal English and can get their point across. We passed the games out and tried to explain the rules to the children. I don't know if they got the whole concept, but they were all very appreciative and quickly began playing with the games.

Our mission is to transport fuel to all the surrounding camps like ours in Iraq. We drive semi trucks with fuel trailers that carry about 75,000 gallons of diesel fuel. Most of the highways we drive on are like the ones in Indiana only a lot bumpier. My job is to take care of the maintenance on the support trucks that go in the convoys. These are armored Humvees. We perform all the necessary services, replace parts and fix any problems with them. We also go on convoys to deliver fuel, so most of the mechanics like myself pull double duty as mechanics and drivers.

That is pretty much the scoop on what I do over here. I cannot wait to return to the states to see my loved ones and get back to teaching at Lafayette Jefferson High School. I hope to see some of you in a few years when you get to the high school. Until then, continue the good work and never let anyone hinder your creativity. Thank you again for my package.

Specialist Wm. Ryan Smith